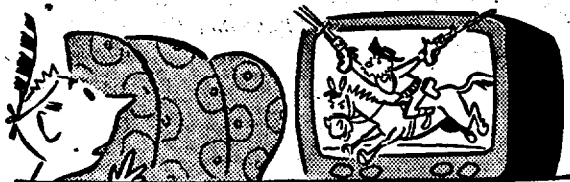


Stanley

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TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY



This Is Your Life

THE MOST exciting experiment on earth is being conducted in a quiet laboratory on the UC campus in Berkeley. It has nothing to do with nuclear energy or sending monkeys to the moon.

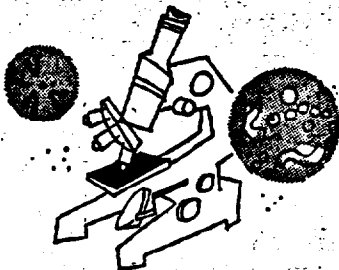
It is an attempt to translate the language of life.

The place is the Virus Lab and its director is Dr. Wendell Stanley. His experimental field lies in the no-man's land between living things and nonliving things.

It was in this awesome area that Dr. Stanley isolated the first virus, purified and crystallized it. For this he received a Nobel Prize in 1935. Until that time viruses were like the weather. Everybody complained about them but no one DID anything.

Dr. Stanley will re-create that historic experiment today on the first of an eight-part TV series titled "Virus," told in layman's terms and made possible through a KQED grant from the National Science Foundation. (Channel 9 on Tuesdays at 4 p.m. with repeats Wednesdays at 8:30 p.m. and Fridays at 7:30 p.m.)

Recently, Stanley and staff have discovered nucleic acid, the hereditary material of viruses and of all living things. In this acid are the secrets of life itself. It is a thrilling step toward an unbelievable goal.



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LAST WEEK I put on my rubber gloves and hopped over to see Dr. Stanley. I expected to see a cross between Dr. Frankenstein and The Wizard of Oz pouring smoky fluids from one test tube to another.

"Go right in, he's expecting you," said an assistant. I did and there was a happy looking gentleman with sparkling eyes, a fine pink complexion, and a splendid sense of humor. He was sitting at a large desk under a window overlooking the entrance to the Greek Theater. There were books stacked everywhere and not a test tube in sight.

What I mistook to be an abstract modern painting turned out to be an enlargement of a crystallized mass of polio viruses — the size of a grain of salt.

"There's enough virus in that one crystal to cause polio in everyone in the United States — provided of course that they were susceptible and it could be distributed," said Dr. Stanley.

Among the current projects of Dr. Stanley and his staff is defining the relation of viruses to cancer — particularly the tobacco mosaic virus. "A pack of cigarettes a day will increase your chance of lung cancer by 80 per cent," he said. "But of course the incidence of lung cancer is low."

Nevertheless, Dr. Stanley does not smoke cigarettes. He gave them up shortly after making the above discovery.

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BUT DR. STANLEY'S thoughts are on a far more significant goal. He explains it this way: "The amount of information needed to build a man is approximately one million pages of theory. Yet all this information is contained in the thread-like molecule called nucleic acid, which is the essential genetic material of viruses and all other cells.

"The Morse Code is made up of two symbols — the dot and dash. Yet by combining them in different ways a telegrapher can reproduce the Bible. In a single molecule of nucleic acid is written the language of life. It is written in a code of 6500 symbols.

"I hope to break that code," said Dr. Stanley, simply.

Someone has said, "It is a good idea for a man to have his eyes and mind fixed on distant stars."

Dr. Stanley is one of these. And meeting him is an immensely rewarding experience.